

Christoph Draeger - Apocalyptic Journeys

Autor(en): **Felley, Jean-Paul**

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each work exists, or is at least programmed, even before the first stroke of the brush. Raoul Pictor, however, seems quite oblivious of all this; he goes on working tirelessly, day after day and year after year, forever seeking his own style ("Raoul Pictor cherche son style"). He will continue to do so until his creator, Hervé Graumann, decides it is time to close down the "art studio" and pull his artist out of circulation.

Inevitably, the assiduous Raoul Pictor's destiny reminds us of our own. We too were set down into a world, into a finite space, which we call reality. And ever since, we have built and worked and struggled there for something that, at best, has

been conceived and generated somewhere else, in an imaginary dimension, and according to a formula that incorporates everything – every impulse of the creatures, every movement of the stars, every thought and every brush stroke. How very much we would like to set our eyes on the screen script and, as in some films, rewind the reel from end to beginning and replay our lives, making some corrections to it this time round. Who knows, maybe that way we could change the ending a bit or even obliterate it entirely, so as to catch a whiff of eternity. For the time being, though, such an adventure still belongs to the world of fiction, metaphysics, virtuality, and ... art.

Jean-Paul Felley: Christoph Draeger – Apocalyptic Journeys

On the black day that was September 11th, still before the events took place, I sent off an e-mail off to Christoph Draeger, inviting his contribution to this issue of Swiss Art. Of course it was only once the dust spread by the collapse of the World Trade Center's twin towers had begun to settle that Draeger received my message.

In but a few hours, my proposal, written in such a light vein at the time, took on a whole new significance. His answer was curt, asking me to wait for a last photograph that would again have New York as its subject.

Draeger began his Apocalyptic Journeys photographic series in 1994, with a shot related to the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center that, on 26 February 1993, had left five dead. Since then, Draeger has kept on traveling and his series growing, for rare is the city that has never experienced a catastrophe. Until last September 11th, however, he had never been present on the site of a catastrophe at the very time it was happening.

To date, this still ongoing series consists of 47 medium-format (46 × 58 cm), color photographs. Each has a landscape as its subject an urban or rural scene or an architectural aspect thereof, such as a villa with swimming pool, a harbour, a football stadium or, though more rarely, an interior.

At first glance, nothing in particular seems to link the pictures together. It is only the captions accompanying them that provide us with a first inkling, which makes

us tremble. Yet the captions are somewhat confusing: the name of a place and a country, together with a date. We don't know what to make of the date, since it is that of the shot and not that of the event so discreetly brought to mind. Indeed, many of the photographs show no trace of a catastrophe. No need: the sites and their events are already impressed upon our collective memory.

Be that as it may, the date of the event evoked is beside the point. At times, it forms part of our recent history, like the shot of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attack, but at other times it involves facts harking back several millenia, such as to the time when Pompeii was buried by an eruption of Mount Vesuvius. Beside the point, too, is its real importance. Thus the artist applies the same stringency and matter-of-fact approach to all of the shots, whether evoking the bombing of Nagasaki or the death of a princess under a bridge in Paris. Every accident, terrorist attack, earthquake or social upheaval exists above all in our subjective perception of it, in the way it has marked human history.

In short, Draeger's Apocalyptic Journeys are akin to the erection of a strange monument, like a stela that, photograph by

photograph, provides a vision of humanity that is, basically, made up of events marking its end. A monument that, too, draws our attention to our amnesia, and to our faculty for masking life's risks and dangers. A monument to the very fragility of our lives.

